



NIPSO AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE MINUTES

MEETING 21st August 2024, NIPSO, Progressive House

Members Present:

Dónall Curtin – Chair; Independent Member (DC)
Terry McGonigal – Independent Member; (TM)
Patricia Snell - Independent Member, (PS)

In Attendance:

Margaret Kelly – Accounting Officer/Ombudsman; (MK)
Sean Martin –Deputy Ombudsman; (SM)
Kirsty McCool – Director of Governance and Support Services (KM)
Graham Gillespie - WGB (GG)
Scott McCready – WGB (SMcC)
Sarah Sherry – NIPSO; Secretariat (SS)

Julie Healy – Head of Improvement, Engagement and Impact (JH)

Item	Minute
1.	Apologies Apologies from Kathy Doey – NIAO
2.	Conflicts of Interest DC invited those present to register any actual or perceived conflicts of interest relevant to the agenda. No conflicts were noted. DC welcomed GG and SMcC to the committee.
3.	Minutes Minutes from 25 th April 2024 were agreed.
4	Update on Action Points KM updated the following on outstanding actions: Communications Policy – AR is to be invited to the next ARC meeting to present the communication strategy and plan Risk and Assurance Mapping – work is ongoing

	<p>Advisory Committee – still under consideration</p>
5	<p>Ombudsman Update (verbal)</p> <p>MK advised that the pay and grading review is currently underway. A paper will be prepared for consideration by the NI Assembly Audit Committee.</p> <p>Complaints have continued to rise – 13% increase on same period last year and 36% increase in enquires. This has created a degree of pressure on KPI performance.</p> <p>MK and SM have met with all the trust CEOs over recent months with a focus on Patient Safety. The Complaints Standards Team is working with the Trusts on their Complaints Standards approach. MK aims to have all public bodies complete the statutory complaint handling process before her term ends in 3 years. The team are working on a timetable to achieve this.</p> <p>MK and SM have had a significant level of public engagements recently including Trust leadership teams, GP Practice Managers and the Department of Education Senior Management Team.</p> <p>Work is ongoing with Professor Chris Gill, University of Glasgow, on access to Ombuds offices for asylum seekers and refugees.</p>
6	<p>Financial Management</p> <p>KM advised that the current underspend is primarily due to delays in recruitment because of budget timings confirmation, offset using agency staff and over recruitment of IO posts in anticipation of further in year staff reductions.</p> <p>TM queried the rise of professional fees. SM explained it is a small number of cases, which are running from year to year.</p> <p>SM indicated average number of IPA's per case and average cost pr IPA can be useful figures to assist accurate budget preparation.</p>
7	<p>Case Performance Management</p> <p>SM reported the KPIs were met, however, there has been considerable pressure on staff, the total number of cumulative cases at KPI1 is 389, compared to 291 this time last year.</p> <p>KPI2 is 134 compared to 87 last year SM explained that KPI3 is the target raising most concerns. It is currently at 95% however it is forecast at 58%. Plans are in place to address this issue to keep within target but the significant number of cases is creating pressure.</p> <p>DC queried how this might affect quality control, but SM confirmed that rigorous checks are in place, with all final report signed off by MK.</p> <p>There has been an increase in complaints to LGES with KPI4 at 12 decisions compared to 4 at the same point last year.</p>

<p>8</p>	<p>Internal Audit</p> <p>GG advised that on the 1st June the company became WGB, previously known as Wylie and Bisset.</p> <p>GG reported that the 4 audit areas for this year are:</p> <p>Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery – 5 days Governance Framework – 5 days Case Management – 6 days Follow Up Review – 2 days</p> <p>The first provisional date for reporting to the Audit and Risk Committee is 25th October 2024</p> <p>WGB offer a wide range of training topics which would be available to NIPSO. DC requested training on New Standards for the committee members. GG will co-ordinate with SS, for dates</p> <p>At TM's request GG provided background information on his career and the company.</p> <p>DC confirmed with GG to help with the independence of his role that he will have full access to the Chair or the Committee if required.</p> <p>GG continued to summarise the documents Case Management, IA Review and a Follow Up IA Review Plan.</p> <p>DC commented that the 3-year plan is particularly useful however would like Cyber Security and Cultural Audit added.</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>External Audit – NIAO Update</p> <p>KM to circulate management response to audit.</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>Business Plan – Q1</p> <p>KM advised that the new business plan had been written after consultation with SMT.</p> <p>The team is on track with only 2 actions highlighted amber which is due to a slight delay in progress during Q1.</p>
<p>11</p>	<p>Risk Register – Q1</p> <p>KM confirmed a risk regarding the impact of no NI Assembly related to a risk to NIPSO independence has been removed from the top 6 risks although still contained within the overall risk register.</p> <p><i>Recruitment and Retention</i> – SM confirmed work is progressing in taking steps to maintain the retention of staff. However, MK commented that it is difficult when experienced staff leave the organisation due to an increase in salary. NIPSO has attracted many early career</p>

	<p>staff, who benefit from excellent experience and then understandably but unfortunately progress to other organisations.</p> <p>TMcG suggested a Progress Risk Mapping exercise – highlighting the position at the last committee and current position. TMcG and SMcG to share samples with KM.</p>
12	<p>Schedule of Progress Against Audit Recommendations Database Update</p> <p>KM highlighted the progress made recently by SMT progressing the older recommendations, which are nearly completed</p> <p>DC confirmed this should be an ongoing agenda item.</p>
13	<p>Measuring Impact Presentation</p> <p>JH attended the meeting at 11.40 and gave a presentation to the Audit and Risk Committee on Measuring Impact</p> <p>She highlighted the work of her team:</p> <p><i>Engagement</i> – to date, the team has engaged with over 100 V+ C organisations across NI. <i>Impact</i> – Internal Data on who brings complaints to NIPSO and ‘who does not’ provides a more detailed analysis. <i>Post Code Analysis</i> – 3 years’ of information has been collated and there is a better understanding of who has engaged with the office, and helps the team to identify groups who are underrepresented.</p> <p>All the information received is collated into the accessibility plan –which is part of the strategy and a draft plan will be presented to September SMT. Getting the BSI Kitemark around inclusion and accessibility is under consideration. JH/SS to share Accessibility Plan with Committee once complete.</p> <p>DC queried was there any particular gaps identified. JH confirmed that there are gaps in the travelling community/ethnic groups/young people/west of Northern Ireland and carers.</p> <p>JH left the meeting</p>
14	<p>Comment on Information Items</p> <p><i>Standard Financial Rules.</i> KM to circulate the NIPSO gift policy.</p> <p><i>HR Policies</i> – SM provided an update. <u>Hybrid Policy</u> – work in progress and ready to reissue. A more in-depth review of the policy is proposed in the coming year. <u>Parental Leave</u> – Review ongoing – no notable change <u>R + D Disposal</u> – with PRONI – will not be laid in Stormont until 2025</p>
15	<p>Date of next meeting</p> <p>Friday 25th October 2024 – Progressive House, Pre-Meet at 9.30am for Chairperson, Committee Members, Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman</p>